



Embrace the Suck: A Crossfit Memoir

Stephen Madden

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To be fit, or CrossFit?

Lifelong amateur athlete Stephen Madden decided to put himself to the test. He immersed himself in the culture, diet, and psyche of CrossFit--the fast-growing but controversial fitness regime that's a stripped-down combination of high-intensity aerobic activity, weightlifting, calisthenics, and gymnastics. Madden is just one of over two million athletes worldwide to do so. But what's crazier? The fact that such a grueling regimen--in which puking and muscle breakdowns during workouts are common--is so popular, or that people pay good money to do it?

In *Embrace the Suck*, the former editor-in-chief of *Bicycling* magazine explores with irreverence, humor, and soul-touching candor the fitness revolution sweeping America. Madden chronicles the year he devoted to trying to master all the basic CrossFit exercises, like double unders, muscle-ups, and kipping pullups, and immersing himself in the Paleo diet that strips weight from its followers but leaves them fantasizing about loaves of bread. Along the way, he explores the culture of the sport, his experience becoming a CrossFit coach, and some basic questions about himself, his past, and his athletic limitations--and why something so difficult and punishing can be at once beautiful, funny, and rewarding.

Whether you are a CrossFitter or a nascent athlete, you will come away from this book understanding the limitless potential of the human body and mind, and will learn what it takes to welcome and defeat any kind of suck.

Embrace the Suck: A Crossfit Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Embrace the Suck: A Crossfit Memoir for online ebook

Morgan says

For those who have never done Crossfit, this is a good look into the various components of how it operates, what it feels like, and the various pieces of it all. It offers insights into why we do it, even when it hurts and leaves us melting on the floor and unable to move for days. Those who have done Crossfit will connect with various parts and say "That's so true" or "I've felt that same thing." It's validating to know that I'm not the only one who still struggles with mindset issues and kipping after over a year doing this. And while his experiences don't always match mine (seriously, a SEALFIT course just for kicks and giggles?!), they do offer a strong correlation for why I love Crossfit and what it has done for me and my husband.

Booksie123 says

I absolutely adored this book and was disappointed to see it end. I want to buy the author a beer and thank him for reminding me that being an adult means occasionally you have enough fun to forget that you're tired and your back hurts.

I related to that fat kid who never excelled in any particular sport. If I didn't make a team in school I gladly accepted the role of "manager" or "statistician" just so I could still ride the bus with the team and see the games. I have one thing to say to all those people who picked me last for their team in gym class: good call, I'm really very bad at sports. Still, middle age left me bored at yoga and Soul Cycle sucked mine right out of me. My cousin had been strongly (and repeatedly!) encouraging me to try Crossfit and I went to check it out. This book perfectly describes the feeling of entering the box. I'll be honest, I never really made it off the 'on ramp', but the place itself fascinated me, and I could see why the Crossfit phenomenon is a thing. The community aspect of it is huge. Everything is done in groups, which fosters encouragement, accountability and bonding. All the various workouts and exercises are standardized across the community so there is a whole jargon that explains these things. So if you meet someone from across the country who also does Crossfit, you instantly speak the same language. Of course, everything that makes it great to be part on the inside of this group also makes it annoying as hell for anyone in the outside.

The author weaves his personal and heartfelt story beautifully throughout this fitness log. Learning of his upbringing, sibling support and neighborhood rivalries gave insight into why he stuck with it and embraced the suck that is monumental in becoming a better person.

Let's face it, the best fitness routine is one you'll stick with. Crossfit is expensive and certainly not for everyone- but this story gave me hope that even a middle aged out-of-shape mom like me can realize that love is in fact the answer.

Bernie Gourley says

Embrace the Suck is one man's account of his experience with Cross-fit and other high intensity fitness regimens, including SEALFIT 20X. While Madden comes across as a regular Joe, i.e. not one of those

crazed individuals who wreck their bodies through lack of rest, failure to heed the body's warnings, or by way of starvation diets pursued to get that perfect cut, he's a cheerleader for Cross-fit. If one is looking for an unbiased account of the strengths and weaknesses of Cross-fit, there are probably more objective accounts of the system's pros and cons. This book is for someone who's trying to psych themselves up for high intensity interval training. In that regard, the book does a good job because Madden always portrays himself as a human with the unique set of strengths, weaknesses, and limitations that that condition entails. He succeeds because he guts it out in the company of the people around him who are portrayed as being more fit (at least in some dimensions) and driven than he.

Still, Madden's account does give one a taste of the ugly side of the notoriously cult-like fitness system. For example, there is the trainer who refers to orange juice as poison--because it's a high glycemic index carbohydrate. Even more disturbing is the wife who chastises him upon seeing a photo of him smiling as he crossed the finish line in a marathon--because it showed he hadn't pushed hard enough. [Come on, it's not as if, even if he'd died upon crossing the finish line from exhausting all bodily resources, that some Kenyan wouldn't have been hours ahead of him.] Madden does include a chapter about pain and injuries, but it just suggests one should know what is run-of-the-mill fatigue and what is an actual injury. He mentions an example of a shoulder injury from his own body that he "should probably get checked out." Furthermore, the final chapter seems to be a cautionary tale about packing too much training into too few days.

The book lays out the Cross-fit approach to exercise, and explains why it is so successful without getting deeply into the research. For those unfamiliar with high intensity interval training (HIIT), the general principle is that one constantly varies one's workout, and that said workouts are done at maximum intensity with short and regimented rest breaks (though the core workout--i.e. the so-called WOD, workout of the day, is often quite short, i.e. 15 -20 minutes.) The track record for increasing fitness for this approach is good. Studies have indicated that one can get about the same level of cardiovascular benefit as one does from traditional cardiovascular exercise while building muscle (endurance activities like running pursued in isolation tend to result in muscle wastage) and reducing risk of repetitive stress injuries (because one is always changing one's workout / movement.)

It sounds like there's no down-side. The workouts are short (granted you may puke, but you're out the door in an hour or less.) The benefits are high, and it doesn't seem to be deficient in cardio--the one area in which one might think it would be. The jury is still out on the injury risk. Cross-fit puts out guidelines (which Madden explains) on how frequently one should take a rest day and on the need for perfect form. Those who follow the guidelines may not have any higher risk than other exercisers (the science remains insufficient.) However, the problem may be that it's hard to maintain the aforementioned perfect form when a trainer is shouting, "faster, faster, faster" in one's face. Furthermore, moderation and following rest suggestions has apparently not proven the strong suit for many Cross-fitters, some of whom come down with rhabdomyolysis (a deterioration of skeletal muscle from over-exertion / insufficient rest.)

Diet is, of course, an essential topic for any book on fitness, and Madden touches on the two diets that are popular with Cross-fitters. One of the diets, The Zone, is quickly dismissed as being of little use to him because it requires weighing out one's food portions, and that level of anal retentiveness is beyond his capabilities. The other diet popular in Cross-fit is the one that Madden practices and addresses in the chapter on diet. It's the so-called Paleo diet--in which one is supposed to eat like one's pre-agrarian ancestors--except if it involves a high glycemic index food that our ancestors ate, in which case, no. Madden stresses the 80% rule that other Cross-fitter put him on to. That is, follow the diet in a strict way 80% of the time, but allow for a cheat here and there of no more than 20%. Madden's approach to diet, like his workout drive, seems more moderate and approachable than that of other individuals one sees in the book.

The most fascinating chapter was his description of completing the SEALFIT 20X challenge. This is a one [long] day program in which one trains like a Navy SEAL. It's part of a fitness and mental toughness conglomeration headed by former-SEAL Mark Divine. This training is a bit different than the Cross-fit workouts in that endurance is a major challenge, and the mind is challenged as much as the body. I don't just mean that will is important, but the SEALFIT program tests one's ability to use one's brain under the pressure of intense physical training.

I'd recommend this book for those interested in learning about the Cross-fit and SEALFIT 20X experience. If one is trying to get an unvarnished view of Cross-fit, you may want to start with another book before getting to this one. It's readable and thought-provoking.

Eileen Winfrey says

The story of the author's CrossFit journey, complete with workout descriptions and actions. If you want to read a middle aged guy's fitness journal, this could be of interest to you. Even though I CrossFit myself, I couldn't connect.

Dan says

I was initially excited to find a CrossFit book in the library as I do three WODs a week myself. But maybe that's why it was boring to me as I have experienced all what the author is describing. I didn't learn anything new. So it's probably a good book for someone who knows nothing about CrossFit. Lastly there was too much cursing which since the author is a writer and an editor I was hoping for more creative descriptions of CrossFit rather than lots of cursing because his workout was hard. The curse words detract from the message of the book.

Gjcollins says

Not impressed. Especially since I paid full price for the book. He author is the editor of Bicycling Magazine but the book read like someone that doesn't know how to write or edit. There was a chapter that was plunked in there to fill space, it was obvious. Just not a great read. Quick but not worth the time or money.

Jason says

Great Intro to Crossfit

I enjoyed reading this memoir about one man's experience with Crossfit. He does a great job of detailing what it is like to enter the Crossfit world at an older age than your typical participant. I highly recommend this book to anyone new to Crossfit especially if you think your best athletic days are behind you. Embrace the suck!

Starpulp says

So relatable

His descriptions of workouts, woods and experiences bring me right back to my worst and best experiences working out, participating in races and finding fitness. Fun read.

Marykay Pogar says

Good summary of the history of the Crossfit phenomenon and gives some perspective about why it's popular. But I still have no desire to participate in it.

Amy says

One of my favorites!

Angie says

Let's be honest, a book about Crossfit and all the struggles and triumphs....I was all over reading this book! It was well written from a man in his late 40's who wanted to give Crossfit a try, after all he was a great runner and cyclist, why wouldn't he be great at Crossfit? Instead he learned how humbling it can be to master the Olympic lifts and work on pullups. It's not only about Crossfit, but talks about his life as an overweight child and how he found running and that helped turn his 'althetic' life around. If you are into Crossfit or just curious about it, it's a great book to read.

Meg says

I just - he thinks the back squat is an Olympic lift okay? And there is no such thing as a squat snatch, it's a snatch! lordy : love is the answer - there, no need to read the book at all. Also, no... whatever - I disagreed with most of the fitness stuff.

Carianne Carleo-Evangelist says

Madden is a really engaging writer, surprised to find this was his first book. I have no interest in cross fit, but I've heard a lot about it through friends and was curious to read someone's experience about it. Madden thoroughly removed any doubts I had about possibly doing Cross Fit -- I think I'd run an ultramarathon before I considered a morning in The Box. That said, this is a really interesting experience at CrossFit and

what makes it different from other sorts of exercise, including the popular Boot Camps and the spartan type races that he joined. I really like the special elements he focused on, like 20X and the Murph. A good read, whether or not you're interested in crossfit

Richard says

This book feels like a really Sports Illustrated piece. There simply is not much substance here. If you've been doing CrossFit for a while I think you'll say "meh". If you're new to it, better to spend the the time to read this by being at your box. It's not funny or witty or even very long.\$26 for 190 well spaced pages that can be read in a flash and in the end doesn't provide any pay off. I'd skip it.

JB Lynn says

Loved it! Flew through this one. If this doesn't inspire you to take a closer look at what you're really made of, I don't know what will.
